



Digital Infrastructure - Update of the WBIF Guidelines

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Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans

- One of the flagships of the 2018 Western Balkans strategy
- The aim is to ensure that the region benefits from the digital transformation and are adequately prepared when they join the EU
- Five main areas of action:
 1. Lowering the cost of roaming
 2. Deployment of broadband
 3. Strengthen the digital economy and society including digital skills
 4. Capacity building in digital trust and security, enhance digitalisation of industries
 5. Boost research and innovation
- Deployment of broadband is a key element and a prerequisite for points 3 – 5.

Digital Europe Programme: 2021-2027

- Supports a wide deployment of digital technologies to support digital transformation of Europe's society and economy
- EU focus on: Supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, advanced digital skills, 5G and Digital Innovation Hubs.
- Its goal is to improve Europe's competitiveness in the global digital economy and increase its technological autonomy.
- WBIF can support preparation of a pipeline of potential projects to ensure the WB region can take active part in the programme. For now this includes areas like broadband, eInfrastructures for scientific data and High performance computing (HPC).

The key role of broadband infrastructure

- Enable digital transformation
 - To connect public administrations, schools, universities, health institutions (needed for e-government, e-health, e-procurement)
 - A precondition for industry development and competitiveness
 - For day-to-day household applications (online sales, banking, etc)
- Bridge the digital gap with EU and prepare for "EU's Gigabit Society"
- Ensure that the infrastructure is future-proof and focusing on areas that lag behind
 - To reduce the rural-urban divide
 - To increase the overall penetration rate
 - To address low broadband speeds
 - To connect public administrations, schools, health institutions, research centres, etc

The WBIF Digital Infrastructure Guidelines 1

- The main priority remains broadband roll-out, including mapping of existing infrastructure.
 - Increase national coverage, including in rural areas
 - Increase speed of networks
- To ensure the supply of basic services of the digital age and promote innovative and competitive services to citizens and business.
- Technical Assistance with a focus on the identification and establishment of projects that are eligible for future investment funding.

WBIF Digital Infrastructure Guidelines 2

- Proposed widening of the scope to include:
 - Support roll-out in also more populated areas for **connecting all socio-economic drivers** (e.g. businesses, schools and libraries, research centres, transport hubs, public services) – WBIF can support the mapping of needs, identification of suitable projects.
 - **e-Infrastructures** to address the needs of scientists and researchers for digital services in terms of networking, computing and data management. EU has the **GÉANT** network that interconnects Europe's national research and education networking organisations. The Western Balkan region is only to a limited extent included in the network. - WBIF can support the mapping of the needs of development of eInfrastructures in the region and facilitate their access to EU infrastructure.
 - **High performance computing** (HPC) "supercomputing", the core of major advances and innovation and a strategic resource for Europe's future. Supporting HPC for connections and cooperation with the EU, e.g. neighbouring EU Member States and HPC planned centres in Sofia (Bulgaria) and Maribor (Slovenia). - WBIF can support the development of HPC in the region and also facilitate their access to EU infrastructure.

Examples of possible projects

- **Broadband Mapping** - mapping of existing infrastructure and white zones
- **Rural/urban broadband development** - connecting governments, schools, health institutions, support to projects that struggle to attract private sector investments
- **Fixed-wireless for sparsely populated areas** - a substitute for fixed broadband infrastructure in rural and difficult accessible areas
- **Balkans Digital Highway** – using existing energy grid for broadband
- **Infrastructure-sharing** – ensuring systematic synergies with energy, telecom, rail, road infrastructure projects
- **Research infrastructures** – ensuring research communities are adequately connected
- **HPC mapping** – connecting the region to EU's supercomputers